



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **LONGTIME FUGITIVE IN LOS ANGELES MONEY LAUNDERING CASE CAPTURED IN MIAMI**

*Arrest is third in as many months stemming from decade-old probe*

LOS ANGELES – A 60-year-old fugitive is expected to be returned to Los Angeles soon to face charges following his arrest in Miami this week stemming from his role in a massive drug-related money laundering scheme uncovered a decade ago involving Colombia's Cali drug cartel and Mexico's Juarez drug cartel.

Frank Alfonso, who had been a fugitive since his indictment in May 1998, is scheduled to appear Monday in federal court in Miami for an identity hearing. The naturalized Cuban was taken into custody March 28 by agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) at a triplex in the Little Havana neighborhood of Miami. Alfonso's arrest came after the FBI received an anonymous phone tip about his whereabouts.

The onetime Los Angeles resident is accused of serving as a "money runner" for Mexico's Juarez drug cartel. He is one of 112 individuals and three major Mexican banks indicted in an undercover ICE investigation called "Operation Casablanca." When Operation Casablanca culminated in May 1998, it was considered the largest drug money laundering investigation in U.S. history. Launched in 1995, the investigation targeted professional money launderers for Colombia's Cali drug cartel and Mexico's Juarez drug cartel, as well as numerous Mexican and Venezuelan bankers who helped launder their drug proceeds.

Alfonso is the third Operation Casablanca fugitive arrested in as many months. Last month, ICE agents in Los Angeles arrested Juan Medina, Jr., another accused "money runner" for the Juarez Cartel, as he returned from a cruise to Ensenada with his wife. Medina was identified by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers as part of a routine screening of the cruise ship's passenger manifest.

In January, authorities in Mexico announced the capture of one of the kingpins in the case, Jose Alvarez-Tostado. Alvarez, who was believed to be the Juarez cartel's financial manager, allegedly collected and laundered millions of dollars from the organization's drug sales in cities across the United States. He is awaiting extradition from Mexico.

Operation Casablanca ultimately resulted in the seizure of more than \$100 million and the arrest of more than 160 individuals, including dozens of Mexican and Venezuelan bankers. Criminal indictments were also brought against three of Mexico's largest banks, Bancomer, Banca Serfin, and Confia. Two of the banks, Bancomer and Banca Serfin, later pleaded guilty to criminal money laundering charges and forfeited a total of nearly \$14 million to the U.S. government. Confia entered a civil settlement and forfeited \$12 million.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*